

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

161915Z Mar 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 001031

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/WE, WHA/AND, WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: SPANISH OFFICIALS DISCUSS VENEZUELA SALE WITH CHARGE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires J. Robert Manzanares, reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Spanish Deputy Defense Minister Francisco Pardo requested a meeting with Charge Friday, March 11 to explain Spain's plans to sell military equipment to Venezuela. In the meeting, Pardo denied reports that Spain would sell "Corvette" gunships to Venezuela, said none of the equipment sold would be for offensive use and repeatedly insisted Spain wanted no misunderstandings with the U.S. on the issue of the sales to Venezuela. Charge spoke again with Pardo March 15 to discuss Pardo's comments on the Venezuela sale to the Senate Defense Commission. Pardo insisted again that none of the equipment included in the sale would be for offensive purposes, although he did say Spain planned to sell the Chavez government "oceanic" patrol boats. Pardo also emphasized the ship sales were critical to the survival of state-owned shipyard Navantia. On March 16, Spanish Foreign Ministry political director Rafael Dezcallar said Spain shares the USG's concerns about Chavez' negative influence in the region, and will work to check Chavez's destabilizing activities. Charge told Pardo and Dezcallar that if Spain wants to improve bilateral relations with the U.S., Spain's high-level outreach to Chavez -- including these proposed sales -- is no way to go about it. End summary.

2. (SBU) On Friday, March 11, Pardo asked Charge for a quick meeting later that day to explain the government of Spain's plans for military equipment sales to Venezuela. (NOTE: Pardo's call followed March 10 meetings in Madrid U.S. Attorney General Gonzales had with Spanish Vice President Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega and FM Moratinos during which AG Gonzales expressed the USG's concern regarding Spain's policies towards Venezuela. END NOTE.) In the meeting with Charge, Pardo said he wanted us to know that, contrary to press reports, Spain is not selling Corvette gunships to Chavez, rather "defensive" items such as Coast Guard/Maritime patrol boats and transport aircraft. He said Spain was willing to sell the same/similar equipment to Colombia.

3. (C) Throughout the meeting, Pardo repeatedly insisted that Spain wanted no misunderstandings with the U.S. on this, and said the sale was vital to Spain's quasi-governmental defense manufacturing company, Navantia (formerly called Izar). Pardo said the company was about to collapse without such a sale. Pardo also insisted the Spanish government sought to influence Chavez and that a meeting currently being worked out that would be in Venezuela with Chavez, Spanish President Zapatero, Brazilian President Lula de Silva and Colombian President Uribe was an effort, spearheaded by Lula, to apply joint pressure on Chavez. Pardo concluded by saying the GOS wants to be completely transparent with the U.S. on the sale issue and wants the information the U.S. gets on the matter to come directly from the GOS, not from other potentially inaccurate sources.

4. (C) Charge replied that while we appreciated Pardo's transparency in informing us about the sale, that fact that we listened to the explanation in no way could be interpreted to imply that the USG approves or agrees with these sales or Spanish rationale for its outreach to Chavez. Charge noted it was difficult to see how these overtures would influence Chavez to end his adventurism in the region and embark on true democratic reform. Charge further stated that we do not understand the Spanish government's outreach to Chavez and what GOS hopes to gain by it other than helping Navantia.

5. (SBU) Pardo also told Charge he planned to inform the Spanish Senate's Defense Commission on Monday, March 14, about the Venezuela sale.

6. Pardo made his presentation to the Senate Defense Commission March 14. Press reports the next day conflicted over what Pardo said and what, in fact, Spain was proposing to sell to Venezuela. Charge thus telephoned Pardo to get some clarity. Pardo said reports by national daily El Pais (close ties to Socialist Party) that Spain planned to sell Venezuela, among other things, a number of Corvette warships, were simply incorrect. Pardo emphasized that nothing Spain

would sell Venezuela would be for "offensive use." Pardo said the deal would include civilian transport ships, military transport planes, coastal patrol boats and "oceanic" patrol ships. He said none of the ships would include helicopter landing pads or cannons, despite press reports to the contrary. Pardo declined to tell Charge how many ships and planes Spain planned to sell, but a press report (Europa Press internet wire service) which Pardo termed as "accurate" said the deal would provide jobs for 600 workers at Navantia for six years, and 300 jobs for the Spanish subsidiary of EADS aerospace firm for three years. Pardo asserted again to Charge that the sale was important for Navantia's survival. He added that he would get Charge a transcript of the Senate proceedings so Charge could see exactly what Pardo said to the Commission. Charge re-stated to Pardo that we failed to understand Spain's outreach to Chavez and said it would not be constructive for U.S.-Spain relations.

17. (C) In a March 16 conversation with Charge, the MFA's political director, Rafael Dezcallar, said Spain shares the USG's concerns about Chavez' destabilizing influence in the region. Dezcallar assured Charge the GOS will work to curb potentially dangerous Venezuelan actions. "Spain wants to be on the same side as the U.S. with respect to Venezuela," commented Dezcallar. Specifically on the armaments sale, Dezcallar said the MFA has somewhat been at odds with the Defense Ministry on this issue and is trying to balance Navantia's needs with the impact the sale would have on Spain's relations with other countries, including the U.S. As such, the MFA is trying to pare back the sale a bit, though Dezcallar did not say in what way. Dezcallar also said Spain would be very much interested in seeing any intelligence the U.S. has on Chavez' mischief in the region and would work with the U.S. to act on it.

18. (C) Comment: Despite Pardo's assurances that none of the military equipment Spain plans to sell Chavez will be used for offensive purposes, Chavez can obviously use the equipment offensively if he chooses. According to DAO Madrid, the oceanic patrol ships Pardo mentioned can displace anywhere from 1500 to 1600 tons (Spanish military sources told DAO the vessels will be similar to Spain's Serviola class ships), are specifically designed to navigate the high seas and can be outfitted with 76 mm guns that can reach a target over 6 miles away.

19. (C) Comment continued: Regardless of Chavez's true intentions, the Spanish government's approach with us on its policies toward Venezuela is either naïve or disingenuous or both. Embassy Madrid's concerns are twofold -- the effect of Spain's actions on our Venezuela/regional policies, and their effect on the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Spain. We have told the Spanish government over and over again that if it truly wants to improve bilateral relations with us (which senior GOS officials continually tell us), Spain's high-level outreach to Chavez (as well as to Castro), which is neither understood nor welcomed by Washington, is not the way to go about it.

MANZANARES